DISTRIBUTING CONTENT DATA

[0001] This invention relates to distributing content data to user terminals.

[0002] User terminals such as mobile phones, personal computers and PDAs (personal digital assistants) often support user applications that can interpret content data that can be supplied to the terminal by a user to provide the terminal with additional or alternative functionality. For example, a mobile phone may be able to interpret content data defining audio or video information, or may have an interpreter that can run software in a language such as Java. The audio or video information could be audio or video clips to be displayed and/or replayed on the phone, or a picture that can be used as virtual wallpaper to decorate the display of the phone. The software could provide a wide range of different functionalities, for instance a new game, a screensaver or a new application such as an e-mail reader or a web browser.

[0003] Data of this type can be distributed in a number of ways. First, pre-recorded media bearing the content data can be distributed to users of the terminals, who can then load the content data locally on to the terminals. This is the case, for example, with the distribution of data on pre-recorded CDs. This method has the advantage that users can buy the pre-recorded media in a traditional physical shopping transaction. Alternatively, the content data can be made available through a network such as the internet, and users can then pay for the content data on-line and download it to their terminals. This method has the advantage that there is no need to physically distribute media carrying the data, which saves on distribution costs. However, some users are resistant to on-line shopping, as it may be unfamiliar to them and is viewed by some as being insecure.

[0004] It would be desirable to have a means of distributing content data to terminals that addressed these problems.

[0005] According to the present invention there is provided a system for distributing various content data to user terminals having at least one application for interpreting the content data and presenting it to a user, the system comprising: a multiplicity of individual tokens, each token bearing an identity code, and having a user-removable obscuring means obscuring reading of the identity code; a content server connected to a communication network whereby it may communicate with the terminals, and comprising data storage means storing the content data, and for each of the identity codes an indication of an item of the content data with which that code is associated, and indicated on the or each token bearing that code, and arranged to, on receiving from a terminal an identity code of a token, retrieve from the data storage means the item of content data associated with that code and transmit it to that terminal.

[0006] Preferably each token is in the form of a card. Alternatively, it may be in the form of any other suitable object.

[0007] Preferably the user-removable obscuring means is such as to be irreversibly removable. The user-removable obscuring means may suitably be a scratch-off coating or an envelope.

[0008] The content data could include, but is not limited to, any one or more of the following: software defining a game, attributes of a gaming entity, unlock codes, software (e.g. Java, BREW or Symbian), pictures, audio clips, video clips, multimedia clips, utilities, ring tones or other alerting configurations, virtual wallpaper and screensavers. The token preferably bears a visible indication of an item of content data or a group of items of content data.

[0009] Preferably each identity code is different from all the other identity codes. Most preferably the content server stores for each identity code an indication of whether content associated with that code has been transmitted to a terminal, and the content server is arranged to on receiving from a terminal an identity code of a token, transmit to that terminal the item of content data associated with that code only if the indication stored for that code indicates that content associated with that code has not been transmitted to a terminal.

[0010] Preferably at least some of the tokens are an individual vending items in their state when the code is obscured by the obscuring means. This is the case if each such token is on sale individually. Preferably the tokens are made available by their sale to the public. The tokens could be sold in groups, for example in packs of five.

[0011] Preferably at least some of the terminals are wireless communication terminals, for instance mobile phones. The application could be a Java platform.

[0012] Preferably each token bears an indication of the content data associated with the code borne by the token. Preferably each token bears an indication of the retail price of the token. If the token is in the form of a card contained within an envelope, the envelope constituting the obscuring means, the price is preferably marked on the envelope.

[0013] According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for distributing various content data to user terminals having at least one application for interpreting the content data and presenting it to a user, the method comprising: making available a multiplicity of individual tokens, each token bearing an identity code, and having a user-removable obscuring means obscuring reading of the identity code; storing in data storage means of a content server connected to a communication network whereby it may communicate with the terminals the content data, and for each of the identity codes an indication of an item of the content data with which that code is associated; and on receiving at the content server from a terminal an identity code of a token, retrieving from the data storage means the item of content data associated with that code and transmitting it to that terminal.

[0014] The transmitted content data may be stored at the terminal.

[0015] The terminal preferably interprets the transmitted content data and presents it to a user of the terminal. The presentation of the data may be done directly, for example by its display or play out to the user, or indirectly, for example by following the instructions or attributes defined in the data so as to present resulting consequences to the user.

[0016] The present invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawing.

[0017] In the drawing:

[0018] FIG. **1** is a schematic cross-section of a first electronic device, a communications system and a card.

[0019] FIG. **1** shows a mobile phone **1**, a communication network **2**, a content server **3** and a card **4**.